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GET AFTER THE GARDEN INSECTS

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A radio talk by C. H. Popenoe, Bureau of Entomology, delivered through WRC and 42 other radio stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company, Tuesday, May 19, 1931, at 1:05 p.m., Eastern Standard Time.

If any of us saw half a dozen bears out in our backyards, the chances are that we would call all the neighbors to help us nail their hides on the barn door. But somehow, we never think of calling out the reserves when we find a few thousand bugs on our crops. Bugs are so small, and so easy to kill one by one, that they don't worry us much until we begin to study them closely. Then, after we find out how many descendants they leave in a year, we scratch our heads and come to the conclusion that bugs are a good deal more dangerous than bears, and much harder to get rid of. Our game laws have set a closed season for bears, but none of our bugs have had to be put on the protected list. And bugs take more human lives and destroy more property throughout the world than all the man-eating tigers and other wild beasts in it.

An entomologist once said that if the house of insects was not divided against itself as it is, the human race would have difficulty in maintaining itself on the earth for ten years. And those of us who have been devising ways of protecting our crops from insects realize that we have to make use of every enemy crop pests have in order to make a profit. For example, unless we protect our insect feeding birds, we are actually encouraging crop losses. We can't afford to overlook anything that helps to give us an edge on the bugs.

We've had another dry winter in the Eastern states, and some of the bugs, at least, seem to like it. It has been one of the best winters for the Mexican bean beetles in several years, and the pests are coming out good and hungry from their winter quarters. You will have to start in early with your magnesium arsenate spray in order to control them. Use five level tablespoonfuls to three gallons of water, and be sure that the undersides of the leaves are covered. If you have a market planting of beans you should use a pound of the magnesium arsenate to 50 gallons of water. Start spraying when the beetles first show up, and repeat once or twice ten days apart if the beetles are very abundant. Any other arsenical is risky treatment for beans.

I don't remember when we've had quite so many letters about cutworms. The weather has just about suited them, and they are out in force, and hungry. The best cutworm dinner is the poisoned bran mash made up by mixing an ounce of white arsenic or Paris green thoroughly with two pounds of dry bran, and making this into a mash with a quart of water into which a half-cupful of molasses or syrup has been stirred. Mix the mash in the morning and scatter it around the plants thinly just before dark in the evening. The cutworms like a late dinner and this one will satisfy them permanently. And don't leave the mash where chickens and livestock can get it before the cutworms do.

Flea-beetles are out, and are busy cutting little round holes through the leaves of young tomatoes and seedlings from the undersides. These beetles look much like fleas and hop just as quickly. Protect your plants with a good coating of hydrated lime or of Bordeaux mixture, or you may have some replanting to do.

I just got back from Louisiana a day or two ago, and talk about Southern hospitality. It was like leaving home when I had to take the train back. They know how to treat you there. And while I was there, I saw a big six-wheeled truck come into town with a million and a half certified weevil-free sweet potato draws for planting around that neighborhood. This is one of the ways to be sure that that little red-and-black sweet potato weevil doesn't get his share of the crop. It is mighty easy to plant weevils with our sweet potatoes and if we don't watch out, we'll find that the weevils grow faster than the vines. It doesn't pay to bed down weevilly seed, even if we can get it for nothing. Have your fields clean and buy certified planting stock if you want to raise salable potatoes and if you aren't absolutely sure that your own seed is weevil-free.

The striped cucumber beetle is likely to show up on your young squash and cucumber plants any time now, if he isn't already there. If you have only a few plants, cut a wooden barrel hoop in half for each hill, cross the halves and stick the ends in the ground to make a frame. Cover this with cheesecloth and rake enough earth around the frame over the edges of the cloth to make it bug-tight. Mosquito bar will not do, for the beetles can get through it.

You may prefer to use a good dust, rather than to cover the plants. If that is the case, you can use either nicotine dust or a mixture of one part of calcium arsenate to fifteen parts of land plaster. Use plenty of dust, so as to cover the leaves and stems of the plants, and the soil around them for a little way.

If you find the bloom and buds being cut in your strawberry bed, you can be sure that the strawberry weevil is getting in his work. Every cut bud or flower means one less fruit this year and one more weevil for next, and every female weevil can cut about 150 buds. Figure this out in crates and start dusting with calcium arsenate and dusting sulphur. For small patches, mix these at the rate of five pounds of dusting sulphur to each pound of calcium arsenate. This will cover about an eighth of an acre if you put it on thickly enough. If you have a commercial or market planting, a one to ten mixture, at the rate of fifty pounds to the acre will do the work.

Add bordeaux mixture to your potato bug spray and get the leafhoppers too. If we have a hot, dry season, you will have much less trouble with hopperburn. And have nicotine or pyrethrum ready for the pests like aphids that suck the juices of the plants, and so cannot be reached by the arsenicals. Paris green and the arsenates won't kill these, because plantlice and leafhoppers can't eat them. The arsenicals are only good for insects that can eat the leaves outside and all.

The United States Department of Agriculture will be glad to send you, on receipt of a letter or post card requesting it, a free copy of Farmer's Bulletin 1371, about the insects and diseases commonly found in vegetable gardens. Or if you have insect troubles that puzzle you, write a letter to the Bureau of Entomology, United States Department of Agriculture, describing the injury to the plant, and the insect doing the damage. Prepare for the summer by writing for Farmer's Bulletin 1371.

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